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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4770  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0681  
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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 2924  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 003225

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [BH](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: CENSUS OF FIRST BHUTANESE REFUGEE CAMP CONCLUDED

REF: KATHMANDU 2746

Classified By: DCM Nicholas Dean for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Durable Solutions Officer Kim Roberson reported on December 13 that nearly all Beldangi I camp residents had appeared for the census, which was completed December 8. UNHCR has identified 120 vulnerable cases, of which only 20 had expressed interest in, and been referred for, resettlement. Roberson complained about bureaucratic delays by the Government of Nepal (GON) in processing cases for resettlement. Rumors abound that local Nepalese citizens are buying their way into the census in hopes of being resettled abroad. Previous assumptions that the total census would result in a count significantly less than the 107,000 registered refugees now appear unfounded.

Beldangi I Census -- Total Numbers Higher Than Expected

2. (SBU) The UNHCR census of Beldangi I camp concluded on December 8. After working out the initial kinks in the process, UNHCR was able to interview and photograph 1,500 refugees daily. According to UNHCR Durable Solutions Officer Kim Roberson, the census team took 18,000 photographs of an estimated camp population of 16,000 refugees. Although Roberson had not yet determined why more photographs were taken than the actual population size, she concluded that nearly all Beldangi I camp residents had appeared for the census.

Vulnerable Cases for Resettlement

3. (SBU) Roberson reported that, in the course of conducting the Beldangi I census, 120 cases were identified as vulnerable on the basis of having been victims of gender-based violence (including domestic violence) or victims of torture in Bhutan. Of these 120 cases, only 20 were interested in resettlement, she said. UNHCR was in the process of referring these 20 cases to the GON for processing. She believed, however, that once UNHCR staff had

reviewed the census data, there would be additional cases, such as single-parent households, who could benefit from early resettlement.

#### Bureaucratic Delays Cited

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14. (C) Roberson complained that the delays by the GON in processing resettlement cases far surpassed the usual bureaucratic sluggishness and indicated to her either a lack of political will or a real reluctance in the Nepalese bureaucracy to allow resettlement of Bhutanese refugees. Once UNHCR officially recommended a group of refugees for resettlement to the Home Ministry, she said, the Home Ministry sent the request to the Refugee Coordination Unit (RCU) in Jhapa, which forwarded it to the relevant Camp Supervisor. The Camp Supervisor then had to send a letter of support for the refugee to the RCU office in Jhapa, which then had to do the same to the Home Ministry. Then the Home Ministry had to seek concurrence from the Foreign Ministry. According to Roberson, once all GON authorities agreed that there were no objections to resettlement for that particular refugee, the same process had to be undertaken for issuance of a travel document. Roberson asserted that, with a recent group of Bhutanese refugees recommended for resettlement to Canada, she had intervened forty times with Home Ministry officials in order to complete the process. (Comment: Home Ministry interlocutors have complained of Roberson's repeated interventions. Perhaps her failure to acknowledge GON sovereignty on resettlement issues has contributed to bureaucratic delays. Having said that, streamlining the bureaucratic process will be necessary before initiating a

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large-scale resettlement program. End Comment.)

#### Local Nepalese Buying Their Way In?

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15. (C) Rumors are circulating that, with the prospect of third-country resettlement, local Nepalese citizens are paying refugees for inclusion in the census in place of missing relatives. When asked about this possibility, Roberson shrugged slightly noting that, without prior photo identification of the refugees, there was no sure way to prevent substitution from occurring. Roberson observed that the census team had been asking specific questions intended to verify family relationships, but that some could have slipped through the process. RefCoord suggested that UNHCR revisit its census procedures to see how it might better identify possible substitutions.

#### Comment

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16. (C) Many members of the international community, including UNHCR, had been operating under the assumption that, due to outward migration, the census would result in a smaller refugee population than the 107,000 currently registered. If the results from the Beldangi I census are representative of the total Bhutanese refugee population, this assumption appears unfounded. The possibility exists that poor local Nepalese are buying their way into the camps, but the numbers are likely low. Refugees are not likely to risk their chance for resettlement by committing fraud in exchange for a few rupees. The absence of a comprehensive GON resettlement policy may contribute to bureaucratic delays in processing vulnerable cases. However, Roberson's poor personal relationship with Home Ministry officials (reftel) also appears to be a factor. Post will continue to seek additional information from UNHCR regarding possible third-country resettlement of vulnerable Bhutanese refugees.

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